



Books about Death

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Ten of the Best

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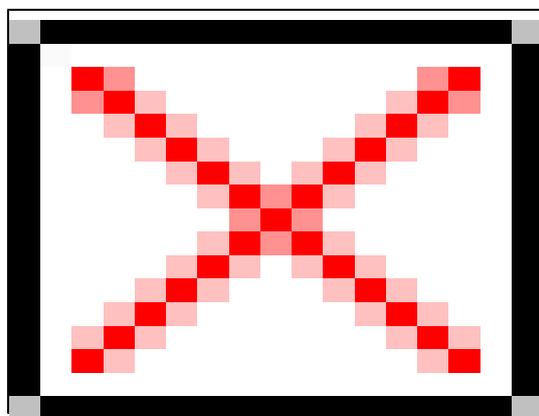
Ten of the Best Children's Books about Death

These books are about preparing for and recovering from death and loss. None of them speculate on what happens after death (as in the Neal Shusterman's 'Everlost' series), or feature characters carrying messages from beyond (Harry Potter's parents) or returning from the dead (Gandalf). They all assume that death is real and final but also share a certain optimism. Whether or not there is life after one's own death, there is definitely life after the death of others, says **Geraldine Brennan** who chooses her 'top ten' children's books about death.

Goodbye Mog

Judith Kerr, HarperCollins, 978 0 0071 4969 8, £5.99 pbk

Mog the cat says goodbye to her family, the Thomases, on the very first page of this last of 17 books in a treasured series. Her death is a matter of course - she simply gets tired - and what matters is her ability to be both present and absent in family life. At first she is still part of the household, with the important task of training up her replacement kitten. Gradually, her contribution becomes less immediate, but she is never forgotten and has not gone far away. A reminder of how we can keep loved and lost pets and people with us by giving them a purpose in our lives. The tone of Mog's unsentimental but gently handled death is typical of her life. No wonder she became the first departed fictional feline to be honoured with an obituary in **The Guardian**. (3-7)



Badger's Parting Gifts

Susan Varley, Picture Lions, 978 0 0066 4317 3, £5.99 pbk

It's time for Badger to die, but he lives on in the skills and pleasures he passed on to his friends. By sharing their memories of Badger, the friends cope with the loss together. An introduction to death, mourning and celebration of life as a community experience. (4-8)

The Bear and the Wildcat

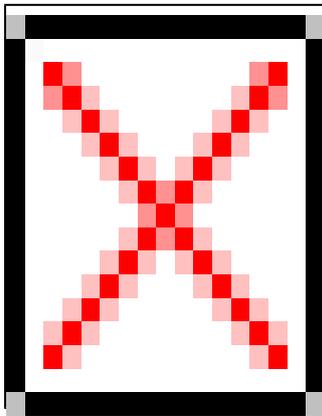
Kazumi Yumoto, ill. Komako Sakai, Gecko, 978 1 8774 6770 7, £9.99 hbk

The bear's friends are uncomfortable when he wants to show them the remains of his departed companion. It takes a new friend, the violin-playing wildcat, to give bear's grief a new focus and help him move on while carrying the memories with him. A deep, complex and calming study of the necessary rituals of death. (7- adult)

My Henry

Judith Kerr, HarperCollins, 978 0 0073 8812 7, £6.99 pbk

Dedicated to the author's late husband, **My Henry** explores the power of the imagination to overcome circumstances, in this case to heal loss. Reality is as powerful as imagination: the details of everyday life with a loved one can endure in the memory with the same colour as imagined adventures of tea with the Sphinx or picnics in the jungle canopy. This book also introduces the delightful concept of the 'self-fulfilling teapot' and challenges assumptions that the lives of elders are dull or empty. (6 - adult)



Moi et Rien (Me and Nothing)

Kitty Crowther, Pastel/Ecole des Loisirs, 978 2 2110 7010 2, £4.60

Kitty Crowther is a top Belgian author/illustrator and current holder of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. This book is not available in English but this need not mean missing out on this gentle story about grief and regeneration, which can be enjoyed through the pictures. Lila misses her dead mother, and finds comfort in wearing her father's old jacket and talking to her imaginary friend, Nothing. When Lila's father is too sad to reach out to her, Nothing helps her to console them both by growing her mother's favourite flowers. (7-12)

Michael Rosen's Sad Book

Michael Rosen, ill. Quentin Blake, Walker Books, 978 1 4063 1784 8, £5.99 pbk

This is a glimpse at an adult's (and parent's) response to grief rather than a child's understanding of it, written after the untimely death of Michael Rosen's son Eddie at 18. How old are we when we learn to smile on top of sadness to spare? Yet the heartening message is that sadness is natural and there is room for happiness next to it. (10 - adult)

Kit's Wilderness

David Almond, Hodder, 978 0 3409 4496 7, £5.99 pbk

Kit is lured into 'The Game Called Death' played by children on top of the disused mines in his village, where child miners died in a pit accident a century ago. The present-day village children's fascination with the rituals of death and the terrifying reality of live burial is linked to the imaginative Kit's stories of the land's first inhabitants, as old as the coal itself. The story is framed by the decline and eventual death of Kit's Granpa, a retired miner who has risked death throughout his working life but eventually dies of natural causes at the centre of a loving family. A tale of how love and

nurturing help to contain death and fear. (10 +)

The Way I See It

978 0 3409 5692 2, £6.99 pbk

Talk to the Hand

978 0 3409 9697 3, £5.99 pbk

Nicole Dryburgh, Hodder

Two unsentimental, un-self-pitying and often witty pocket-sized volumes based on Nicole Dryburgh's diaries as she lives through her teenage years with cancer and loses her sight, hearing and mobility along the way. Nicole was diagnosed with cancer at 11 and died of a brain haemorrhage last year aged 21. In between she studied, worked for the Teenage Cancer Trust, helped to fund a hospital wing for her peers, and relished her friendships, parties, chocolate, Coronation Street and having her nails done. For anyone who encounters a friend or other young person with a terminal condition. (10+)

Stopping for Death: Poems of Death and Loss

Ed. Carol Ann Duffy, ill. Trisha Rafferty, Viking, 978 0 6708 5416 5, OP

It's worth stalking Abe Books and car boot fairs to find this excellent but out of print anthology. Surely being edited by the Poet Laureate, as she is now, can give it a new lease of life? The poems are arranged alphabetically by surname of poet so that Roger McGough's 'young man's death' is followed by Grace Nichols' 'fat black woman[s] brilliant tropical death'. Enjoy finding your own happy (in the circumstances) juxtapositions. (11- adult)

A Monster Calls Patrick Ness and Siobhan Dowd, ill. Jim Kay, Walker, 978 1 4063 3651 1, £6.99 pbk

Patrick Ness's masterly development of an original idea by Siobhan Dowd (who died of cancer in 2007) explores the importance of anger in processing grief. Conor's mother's illness has left him paralysed with terror and denial, not helped by the distant behaviour of anxious observers. The tree monster that appears to be tormenting the boy with his chaotic tales of witches and murderers is in fact showing him the way out of a dark wood. (12+)

Geraldine Brennan is the former Books Editor of **The Times Educational Supplement** and a freelance journalist.

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